

Editor's Corner

What Happened to the ERA?

A lot of people seem to think they are experts on the reasons the ERA failed to be ratified. The conventional wisdom on the ERA blames the advocates: they failed to organize at the grassroots level or their feminism was elitist or their visible leaders were too strident or even insufficiently attractive. There may be some truth in one or more of these explanations, but they do not begin to capture an accurate or complete picture. As usual, conventional wisdom needs to be supplanted by systematic analysis. This issue of *PS* does just that.

As Janet Boles outlines in the introductory article, during the ratification period virtually every tactic was used, including organizing at the grassroots, engaging in electoral campaigns at the state and local levels, coalition building, fundraising, advertising, targeting of states and individual legislators and engaging in a variety of other methods to get the message across in state legislatures. It was not for lack of trying that the ERA was not ratified.

However, it is true that proponents did not fully mobilize their forces in the first two years after congressional approval of the amendment as there was no apparent necessity to do so at the time. By the time full grassroots activities did get underway, momentum had indeed slowed, suggesting that such organizing on behalf of ERA may have come too late rather than not at all.

Nor can the ERA's failure be blamed on inadequate public support, even in the unratified states. As Mark Daniels, Robert Darcy and Joseph Westphal explain, support of the ERA was not limited to upper middle class white women. A majority of men, housewives, even religious fundamentalists and conserva-

tives all favored the ERA, an instructive lesson in the disjunction between public opinion and public policy.

Part of the problem lay in perceptions. If Ellie Smeal, past president of the National Organization of Women (NOW) and leader of the ERA proponents, and Phyllis Schlafly, the key opposition leader, were both housewives, it was Schlafly who succeeded in being perceived as representing housewives. Proponents, on the other hand, seem to have been seen as articulating the demands of an unrepresentative elite.

The opponents also succeeded, as Marian Palley explains, in defining the issue as one of demanding role changes rather than one of calling for economic justice. That tactic, although proponents tried to counter it, was devastating to the ERA.

Margery Elfin reminds readers that this is, of course, not the first time women have failed to advance their political rights. On the basis of the past, we can expect that the issues underlying the ERA will continue to plague policymakers, many of whom apparently thought the ratification deadline would safely diffuse the issue.

Instead, as Palley and Boles make clear, if anything, the ERA effort has strengthened the women's movement. In fact, the side effects of the ratification battle may eventually overshadow the ERA loss itself. NOW, for example, has greatly expanded its financial base and membership, thanks to the ERA. Also, traditional women's groups, not noted for their feminism a decade ago have been transformed. Groups such as B'nai B'rith, League of Women Voters, and even the Girl Scouts, now openly support feminist goals. That seems to me to have considerable implications for the future. The ERA battle was lost but has left a

stronger women's movement in its wake. Special thanks for this issue go to Richard Fenno for dropping in my office one day and suggesting the topic, to Susan Tolchin, Judy Schneider and Beth Schapiro for helping shape and develop the idea, and to the authors, who were forced to operate under unusual time pressure. Joyce Murdoch of the *Washington Post* lent her considerable talents in helping to edit the articles.

Denver Accident

Some readers are aware of the automobile accident at the Annual Meeting in Denver in which five of us from the national office were involved. Most seriously injured was Norinne Hessman, assistant editor of *PS*. I am pleased to report that Norinne was released from the hospital in Denver in late October and will be well enough to have flown back to Washington by the time you read this. With Norinne's return everyone will be out of the hospital and on the road to recovery.

The rest of the APSA has jumped in to help fill the gap caused by the accident. Particular thanks are due Nancy McManus, Joyce Williams, Patricia Spellman and Eloise French for their help in producing this issue.

New Section

You might notice a new section, "Forum on the Discipline," which will appear in

PS periodically. This section will include traditional articles from the Departmental Services Committee and others who survey aspects of the profession, as well as pieces such as the one in this issue by Edward Portis and Dwight Davis. The ideas presented here are those of the authors, of course, and *PS* welcomes responses.

A couple of other innovations at APSA worth noting are the discounts on over 60 different journals available to APSA members and the Council's work to establish sections with APSA. These are discussed in "Association News."

Finally, *PS* is paying a special tribute to Louise Overacker in this issue. Victoria Schuck has thoroughly researched Overacker's work and life—including going to Stanford and reading her Master's thesis—with the result featured in "News of the Profession." If you are sufficiently inspired, you might also flip back to the "PS Appendix" for the citations for awards given at the APSA Annual Meeting this year. This compendium is a useful overview of the kind of work valued in the profession and the reasons it is valued.

Please write if you have ideas or material for any of the sections in *PS*.

Catherine Rudder

December 15: Winter *PS* Deadline

The deadline for submission of materials for the winter issue of *PS* is December 15. Please indicate in which section submitted material should be placed. Also, items for *PS* should be submitted in *PS* format.